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## SOCIAL DECADENCE.

There are three kinds of decadence liable to occur in human society, namely, personal, racial, and social. Personal decadence needs no explanation. When this species of degeneration becomes prevalent, the phenomenon of racial decay occurs. Since the development of civilization depends on the character or mental constitution of the race, and since any degeneration of the race in physique is always accompanied by corresponding weakening of mental powers, it follows that racial decay finally entails social dissolution. Yet though racial decay causes social disintegration the converse is by no means true. With social decadence there is often no sign of race deterioration. Eighteenth century France, for instance, experienced a period of social decay. Yet the French race was then, perhaps, more strong, healthful, and capable than ever before. The mechanical framework of a social system based on institutions and customs which had long since survived their utility, enclosed within its bounds millions of individuals who were just beginning to be conscious of themselves in relation to their fellow men. "Sire," said the Marshal de Richelieu, who had seen three reigns, addressing Louis XVI., "under Louis XIV. no one dared utter a word; under Louis XV. people whispered; under your majesty they talk aloud."<sup>1</sup> Opinion begins to war with tradition. Divine prestige which had for centuries wrapped ancient institutions in its protecting embrace, is suddenly withdrawn, revealing only skeletons. Authority yields to investigation, revelation lies prostrate before science. Skepticism, the necessary antecedent of progress, becomes the ruling principle of thought and action. The critical, comparative method introduced by Buffon, Lavoisier and Lalande is applied by Montesquieu, Diderot, and Voltaire to the political and social questions of the day.

<sup>1</sup> Taine, *The Ancient Régime*, p. 125.

The theories of the thinkers, adopted and carried into action by the Revolutionists, caused such a public sentiment against authority of all kinds that, during the early days of the Revolution, France presents to the world the spectacle of a nation of separate individuals, each so infatuated with his own "rights" that his duties to others are conveniently ignored. On all sides social structures collapse. So far have the people forgotten the value of association that all literary societies, academies of science, schools, seminaries, colleges, even those of the Sorbonne, are suppressed. This presents a state of disintegration—a perfect picture of social decay. Yet so strong, so vigorous is the race that, in but a few years, the liberty-intoxicated people of the Revolution, recovering their balance, erect a new France on the ashes of the old.

Having characterized personal and racial decadence the question remains, What is to be understood by social decadence? "Whatever else a stable society is," says M. Tarde in his *Logique Sociale*, . . . "it is, above all, an interlacement of sympathetic sentiments." The vital elements in every society are the subtle, invisible bonds which make possible association and co-operation and it is to the decay of these that attention must be directed. Social decay, therefore, means the perishing of these vital elements which hold the members of society together.

Now what does the word *decadent* imply? First of all the idea of a former high degree of excellence. *Decadent* which implies a *has been*, must therefore be distinguished from *primitive* which suggests a *to be*. The old man and the infant are alike bald, toothless, weak, "childish" in thought; but these characteristics are due in the one case to worn-out capacities, in the other to undeveloped powers. Just so the primitive group and the decadent group often have much in common. Each is marked by disorder and consequent resort to force to maintain the *status quo* of the classes. But in the primitive type this control by force indicates an

advance from the tribal to a higher organization of the group; in the decadent type it signifies the dissolution of the vital forces of a once prosperous society.

Thus declining Rome used measures of control just as severe as those employed by any primitive society. Personal liberty was as little respected then as at any period in the world's history. Ammianus Marcellinus, writing in the fourth century A. D., of the reign of the Emperor Constantius, says: "For if any one of his military officers or of those who had ever received marks of honor; or if any one of high rank was accused on the barest rumor of having favored the faction of his enemy, he was loaded with chains and dragged about like a beast; . . . every one who was informed against or in any way called in question was condemned either to death or to confiscation of his property or to confinement in a desert island."<sup>1</sup> Still for all this reign of violence, the Romans of this period must not be placed on the same round of the ladder of civilization with the Scotchmen of the fourteenth century, the Corsicans of fifty years ago, or the early Californians. Strictly speaking a society is never retrogressive. Nations may and do decline, but the descent is always made on the other side of the hill. If we liken the course of advancing civilization to the tortuous path of a loop railroad up to the crest of a mountain, we may compare the movement in social decline to the course of a landslide down the further slope. If in respect of violence the England of Henry I. stood about on a level with fourth century Rome let us remember that the one society had the promise and potency of functions which the other had enjoyed and lost.

Again, the word *decadent* embraces the idea of movement. Hence it must be distinguished from *non-progressive*. In a decadent society, therefore, destruction of social bonds is taking place—the group is moving toward ruin. Between the decadent and the non-progressive types of society there

<sup>1</sup> Ammianus Marcellinus, p. 12.

are similarities just as striking as those between the decadent and the primitive groups. A great caking of custom over social life, that pre-eminent characteristic of the non-progressive type, is often displayed in the decadent society. A strong conservative spirit governs affairs domestic and public. Love of the past, hatred of change, and satisfaction with the present condition are, moreover, common to both. But the non-progressive group can last indefinitely. Its civilization is arrested, its energies lie dormant. Yet it is holding its own, in spite of the fact that, compared with the progressive societies of its day, it may seem to be retrograding. It is only awaiting an impulse vigorous enough to start it from the rut in which it has lain for centuries. In the decadent society on the other hand, certain forces are at work dragging it ever further from a state of equilibrium. The group cannot continue as it is.

Modern China and modern Spain may be cited as instances of the above types. In both these countries authority and antiquity sway all things, investigation and innovation are not tolerated. But though China "is shrouded in etiquette like a mummy in its wrappings,"<sup>1</sup> Arthur Smith, the American missionary, says: "If the teaching of history as to what happens to the fittest is to be trusted, there is a magnificent future for the Chinese race." The self-preservative instincts of society dominate all the institutions and traditions of the Chinese. Regard for parents and ancestors and respect for peaceful industries are the controlling influences in their life. "No man is a hypocrite in his amusements," says Dr. Johnson. The play activity in human beings is spontaneous and indicates innate race qualities. This is certainly true in the case of the Chinese, whose favorite games, chess, flying kites, and fantan are an index of their peaceful character. We notice the absence of gladiatorial combats and duels in their scheme of pleasures and a detestation of all warlike achievements. The popular

<sup>1</sup> Taine, *The Ancient Régime*, p. 123.

proverb, "Good iron is not used for nails, nor are good men for soldiers," expresses their contempt for the military profession. The Chinaman's inborn respect for life is shown by the fact that life is seldom taken for political crime, and that human sacrifices have never been demanded by his religion. But patriotism and idealism are utterly lacking in his make-up, and until these two sentiments are supplied there will be little progress possible for him. As Dr. Patten says, "To insure continuous progress each race must receive from other races ideas not developed by its past conditions,"<sup>1</sup> and the Chinese must assimilate foreign ideas to such an extent that love of country and desire to work for ideals will become a part of national character. The Chinaman is essentially practical and utilitarian, and perhaps by appealing to his economic sense he may be taught the advantages of truth and co-operation; he may be led to take a broader view of things; he may be aroused to evince an interest in what is beyond his immediate environment. Then he will see that the system of political corruption, in the meshes of which China is held fast to-day, is alone responsible for her stagnation,—a system which from the lowest to the highest office, in both military and civil life, puts a premium on lying and discourages, nay, even punishes, honest endeavor. Offices are purchased and promotions in the army go to the highest bidder. There is a large number of unpaid employees in both the military and civil service. These men become parasites on the paid officers and the public at large. Chinese officials are skilled experts in the misappropriation of public funds and stores. Take a single instance. The Viceroy of the Course of the River, whose special duty it is to protect and keep in order the banks of the Yellow River, knowing that promotion is always conferred on the viceroy under whose administration the embankment is repaired, has so often caused floods to be produced by artificial means that the popular saying runs: "The best cure

<sup>1</sup> The Development of English Thought, p. 18.

for the Hwang-Ho and the best safeguard against floods, would be to behead all the officials and leave the river to itself." Moreover, much of the fund appropriated for the control of the flood finds its way into the private pocket of the viceroy. This universal system of corruption checks trade and enterprise. Boatmen have to pay such heavy duties to the police for plying that they soon cease to go abroad. All along the line at searching stations goods are examined, and unless a heavy bribe is paid they are destroyed. If a bottle of oil is found on which duty has been paid and the certificate mentions only *oil*, the merchant will be imprisoned on the charge of smuggling *glass* and released only on the payment of a heavy fine. Over ten years ago a company was formed in Canton for the establishment of water works, but the officials demanded such enormous bribes for granting the privilege that the scheme was abandoned. In the same way a fertilizer company, projected for the purpose of cleaning the streets of Canton and converting the refuse into manure, fell through.

There is, however, no doubt that China has turned in her sleep of ages and will soon arouse herself to action. The Reform party of China, including the best element of the Chinese race both at home and abroad—men who have been educated in European and American schools—is fully aware that the time for action is not far off. They realize intensely that under the present régime development is impossible—that the construction of railroads and the introduction of schemes for the development of China's internal resources, under the present system, would merely open up new avenues for corruption. Therefore their aim is the destruction of the government as it exists—which they consider a foreign institution brought by the Tartars—and the substitution of another native system. With the change in government must come the regeneration of the army. When the Chinese soldier feels confidence in his leaders and in his pay, the army will cease to be a "paper army," and will stand as an

organized power for good in national development. General Gordon said of the Chinese soldier that "he was easily led, easily fed, and fearless of death." Is there any reason, then, why the Chinese army, properly fed and paid, should not become a creditable institution? The unprecedented duration of the Chinese nation in spite of its weak army and unexampled system of corruption—a system which really began when Muh (1000-947 B. C.) promulgated a penal code, under which punishment was made commutable into fines—is doubtless due to the sterling race character of the people. Their genius for association, their habit of mutual responsibility, their indefatigable industry, their respect for property and life, their temperance—all these qualities which have acted as preservative forces for the Chinese nation, when joined to the progressive, acquired characters of patriotism and idealism will be responsible for the great change for the better which must soon take place in China. But the Reformers must remember that this new China will not be born in a day; it will be the result of evolution rather than revolution, of slow adaptation owing to the inherent dislike of the race for innovation. Let the would-be reformer of China take warning from Kipling's "fool who tried to hustle the East."

With Spain, however, the case is quite the reverse. She is, without doubt, one of Lord Salisbury's "dying nations." Owing to widespread and inveterate ignorance, due entirely to the control of the people for centuries by the church, the Spanish race has deteriorated from an active, enterprising, independent people to the inert, servile race we know to-day. One needs but reflect upon the attitude of the Spanish people themselves—not the politicians—towards the late war with the United States and towards the peace negotiations, to realize the degeneracy of the race and nation. E. J. Dillon, in the September, 1898, number of the *Contemporary Review*, calls the Spaniards "an impoverished, resigned, and hopelessly lethargic population." Peace at any price was the cry



of the Spanish masses. War meant to them hunger and other species of physical suffering. So engrossed were they in the struggle for personal, vegetative life, so indifferent to everything not connected with their individual interests, that Mr. Dillon goes on to assert that they would not object even if the United States were to declare a protectorate over Spain. The territorial sacrifices, at the cost of which peace was being purchased, meant nothing to the masses. The talk of the politicians about "blots on the scutcheon" touched no responsive chord in the mind of the masses. National honor has no longer a place in the soul of the people. An article in the London *Daily Telegraph*, August 13, 1898, says: "How stands the case with Spain? Her disastrous defeats and the assured loss to her of her foreign possessions, both in the Eastern and Western hemispheres, have left the great body of her citizens absolutely unmoved. The devotee of the 'pundonor' does not feel his honor touched by being beaten to his knees in an international duel; the former mistress of the Indies suffers nothing in her imperial pride at the certain prospect of seeing one of the last remnants of her transatlantic empire wrested from her failing grasp. Large numbers of her common people seem ignorant of the very existence of the West and the East Indian possessions; while those who are aware of it regard them apparently as burdens of which Spain would be well rid. Anyhow it is a matter for politicians to wrangle over, and a sensible Spaniard, with plenty of bull fights to amuse him, will not trouble his head about any such irrelevant matters. The very sentiment of national pride is to all appearance extinct among the Spanish people at large, and with the extinction of national pride it is certain that national life, in the true sense of the word, must sooner or later cease to exist. . . . It (the nation) is dissolved into a fortuitous concourse of traders, pleasure seekers, idlers or what-nots, who acknowledge no other bond of union among themselves than such as each man's personal interests in the matter of business or

amusement have created and may temporarily sustain. Such a descent in the order of civilization . . . . points to the already realized degeneracy and presages the not remote extinction of the race of which so humiliating a story can be told."

Any consideration of the subject of social decay must bear in mind the important fact that social decadence is *not inevitable*. It is a disorder, not a decrepitude. We are all familiar with the theory that societies, like human beings, pass through the stages incident to human life. "The infancy of the Republic," "the youth of the nation," its "old age" are all trite expressions. But there is this important difference to be noted between the life of a group and that of the individuals composing it. Decay, so inevitable in human life, is by no means necessary in social life, because the continuity of society is psychical not physical. When a society has reached the stage of intelligent group consciousness there is no reason why it should not continue its existence for an indefinite period. There is no cause at all for thinking it must finally decay and die.

Again, social decadence must be distinguished from the fluctuations of vitality experienced by healthy as well as diseased societies. Just as there are variations in the physical condition of a healthy person, so sound societies have their periods of relaxation or depression. Allowance must accordingly be made for such a condition of relaxation, and care must be taken not to confound it with the state of actual disease for which we should reserve the word "decadent."

In view of the foregoing may not a decadent society be defined as *a society which is not capable of maintaining a former level of excellence in social products?*

Disease is defined by pathologists as a condition in which the functions of the organism are improperly discharged. Disease is recognized by its symptoms. Among human beings the symptoms of the same disease in different individuals while showing an essential resemblance will always

be modified and sometimes to a confusing degree by peculiarity of temperament. Much more in the history of nations the essential elements of decay will be influenced by racial peculiarities.

Yet the signs of decay in all degenerate societies are sufficiently law-abiding to admit of two well-marked types which may be called the *institutional* and the *individualistic*. In the one case degeneration is due to the overpowering growth of institutions—in the other to the extreme development of individualism. The one is marked by the crushing out of all individual effort, the excess of social control, the growth of institutions at the expense of the individual,—the other by the weakness of social control, the domination of the individual over institutions. Both of these types, starting though they do from opposite poles, eventually manifest the same symptoms of social decadence,—the loss of social ideals, the perversion of the social spirit, the loosening of the ties of sympathy which unite the great classes of the governors and the governed. Under institutional decadence society is burdened with institutions, customs, and traditions which have long outgrown their usefulness and have become calcareous deposits in the social body. Or there is an abnormal domination of one institution over others, as in the case of Spain, where the church controls all. In the last analysis we find the individual of the institutional type of the decadent group, a cringing, ignorant time-server, utterly lacking in independence and initiative, willing, nay, anxious to be led, his horizon bounded by his ego, his one aim self-preservation. Anarchy reigns supreme in the last stage of the individualistic type of decadence, however. Each man is a law unto himself. Institutions, customs, traditions, the preservative forces of society are utterly shattered. Too much license for the individual, ultra development of personality, extreme realization of the ego have done their work. Thus we see that the free play of individual effort, so necessary to progress, so indispensable

a factor in civilization, defeats its own ends if allowed too wide a range, if not controlled by the group for whose development it is in so large a measure responsible.

An analysis of the phenomena accompanying social decadence—both institutional and individualistic—may be made through the study of Spain, which stands as a type of the first, and of Greece and Rome, which stand as types of the second.

Spain has been suffering from a mortal disease since the seventeenth century. The eighteenth century, indeed, presents an attempt at regeneration from without. But as the effort was fruitless there is little doubt that we to-day are witnessing the expiring gasps of the once proud mistress of the Indies.

The spirit of blind obedience to unquestioned authority, credulity, and superstition, the leading character traits of the Spaniard, were inculcated and fostered by the peculiar circumstances surrounding Spain's early struggles for civilization. What could eight centuries of religious wars do but develop religious fervor to the exclusion of all other passions? The Spaniards considered themselves soldiers of the cross and became accustomed to supernatural manifestations. "Their young men saw visions and their old men dreamed dreams." Poverty and ignorance, the necessary results of these long wars, served as aids in developing that absolute loyalty to king and priest which soon became the prominent characteristic of the Spanish people.

Therefore Spain was ready to take precedence among the nations in the sixteenth century, under the leadership of such strong, determined rulers as Charles V. and Philip II. The people, formed all in one mould, did the absolute bidding of the sovereign, who in turn worked for the church. A contemporary of Philip says: "The Spanish do not merely love, not merely reverence, but absolutely adore him (Philip) and deem his commands so sacred that they could not be violated without offence to God."

Under these rulers religious wars were carried on successfully. The Reformation was crushed at home and retarded in Germany. Philip aimed at the empire of Europe, so that he might restore the authority of the church. It was the boast of his emissary Alva, in the Low Countries, that he had put to death in five or six years eighteen thousand persons besides those slain on the battlefield.

The feeling of contentment with their condition, pride in their old beliefs, contempt for innovation soon became fixed in national character. When this sentiment of satisfaction settled down upon the race the death knell of progress was sounded. This harmony of mind, evenness of thought, fettering of capacity was the result of centuries of church discipline. By expulsion, emigration, oppression or extermination of the original, progressive element of the nation the demand of the church that all should think alike was satisfied. But with what result? Thanks to the forced emigration of the Jews, the expulsion of the Moors and the Inquisition, the nation succeeded in getting rid of all original thinkers—of all the unlike, variant factors—hence the resulting population through generations of inheritance was moulded all in one form.

The glory of Spain was, therefore, short-lived, for a people accustomed to being led, as they were, would follow unhesitatingly any leader, the ignorant or foolish as readily as the wise or intelligent. Consequently there occurs a marked deterioration during the next three reigns. As the power of the throne weakens that of the church increases. Spain's decline may be said to begin with the disturbance in the balance of power in her institutions caused by the abnormal development of the church in the seventeenth century. At a time when the power of the ecclesiastics all over Europe was decaying the church tightens her grip on Spain. Laymen in great numbers enter the church. The highest as well as the lowest intellects are dominated by its influence. Cervantes three years before his death became a priest. Lope

de Vega was a priest and officer of the Inquisition. Sandoval, the historian and the authority for the reign of Charles V., was a Benedictine monk. Antonio, the most learned bibliographer Spain ever produced, was a canon of Seville. Zamora, the poet, was a monk, and Calderon, called the poet of the Inquisition, was chaplain to Philip IV.

Owing to church control the condition of Spain in the seventeenth century became truly pitiable. The strongest symptoms of decay were everywhere discernible. Even the upper classes were unacquainted with science or literature, and knew nothing of the commonest events of their own times out of their own country. Books, unless books of devotion, were considered worthless. No one collected them—no one consulted them. Until the eighteenth century Madrid did not possess a single public library. Duc de St. Simon, the French ambassador at Madrid (1721-22), sums up the state of education by saying that "in Spain science is a crime and ignorance a virtue." The military spirit was completely lost. Most of the troops deserted. The few who remained faithful were clothed in rags, received no food and little money. The navy, if possible, was in a worse state than the army. In 1656 it was proposed to fit out a small fleet, but the fisheries on the coast had so declined that it was impossible to procure sailors enough to man the ships required. Charts were lost, and the ignorance of the Spanish pilots became so notorious that no one would trust them. In the cities suffering and want produced the inevitable revolt from control. Madrid tradesmen organized into bands, broke open private houses, robbed and murdered in the face of day. In 1699 Stanhope, the British minister, writes that never a day passed in which people were not killed in the streets scuffling for bread. His own secretary had seen five women stifled to death by the crowd before a bakehouse.

All industries were now degenerate; the soil remained untilled, the arts were soon lost. Seville, which in the six-

teenth century had sixteen thousand looms, which employed three thousand persons, at the accession of Philip V., 1700, could not boast of three hundred. Toledo in the sixteenth century had fifty woolen manufactories—in 1665 it had only thirteen. And this story was repeated throughout the whole of Spain. There was also a marked decline in population during this miserable seventeenth century. Madrid, which at the beginning of the century had four hundred thousand inhabitants, at the end had but two hundred thousand.

A temporary relief at least, came to the wretched, disconsolate, poverty-stricken Spaniards during the next century. The improvement was, however, only superficial as all the reforms were introduced from without and did not spring up spontaneously from the people. In fact the Spaniards were then beyond the possibility of self-regeneration. The seeming success of Spain for a while was due to the fact that all her affairs were now in the hands of foreigners. National spirit there was none. Social ideals had long since vanished. There was such a dearth of capable men that in 1711 Bonnac mentions that a resolution had been formed to place no Spaniard at the head of affairs because those who had hitherto been employed had proved incapable or unfaithful. In the war of succession the Spanish troops were led by foreigners. The Duke of Berwick, an Englishman, became generalissimo of Spain. Finance was administered by Orry who was sent from France and who became the real minister of war. Alberoni, an Italian, and Ripperda, a Dutchman, were in time the most powerful men in Spain. Ripperda tried to reanimate Spanish industry. He established a large woolen manufactory at Segovia, once a busy city. The commonest processes had been forgotten by the Spaniards, so that he had to import workmen too. Charles III. invited thousands of workmen to settle in Spain hoping to invigorate the nation. By his personal power he brought Spain almost up to the first rank again, but since all his improvements were political and not national in origin the country collapsed

at his death, and Charles IV., a pure Spaniard in thought, easily brought about the reaction against the artificial progress of the century. He restored the power of the clergy which had been somewhat lamed in the preceding reigns, and again darkness falls over all. The mind of Spain was gone. The Spaniards did not want to improve; they were satisfied with their inheritance; they were and still are unable to doubt. And this is the work of the church.

And now a short review of the history of the two nations which stand as types of the *individualistic* species of social decadence. The germ of Greece's decadence may be detected already in the time of Euripides. The most significant fact of the age is the growth of that individualism which if controlled leads onward and upward but which in Grecian history reached such an extreme development that it caused the decline of the nation. At first, realization of personality in all—others as well as self—leads to great progress in civilization. For a time it seems as though humanity were broadened. The great care for the individual manifests itself in an organized dispensary system in which the ablest physicians received fixed salaries from the state to care for the poor. Charity is enjoined. The poor have rights and dignities. Even women and slaves are not treated with contempt. "For even a slave," says Philemon, "is our flesh and blood; no one was ever born a slave by nature; fortune has but enslaved his body."

But after a while self-aggrandizement becomes the leading motive of conduct. Striving for power becomes the fashion of the day, and the jealousy, deceitfulness, and acuteness of intellect which this begets are the striking character traits in the prominent men of the age. The ego becomes the centre of interest and the intellect is cultivated at the expense of morals. Impatience with old customs and institutions is manifested so strongly that they rapidly decay. In this age of democracy, opinions change so frequently that the rising generations find themselves out of sympathy with their



fathers. Hence it is a common complaint in the literature of the day that old age is little respected. Sophocles in *Oedipus* speaks of old age as "feeble, unsociable, friendless, the constant object of reproach when all the woes of woes are the partners of our habitation." And Antiphanes exclaims: "Age is like wine; leave but a little in your vessel and it turns to vinegar." Too much respect for age, as in China, impedes progress, but utter disregard of the old in the end also defeats progress, for the undermining of tradition and the maiming of custom which naturally result from contempt of the old, seriously weaken the preservative forces of society. As a consequence of this we discover in the Greek life of the succeeding epoch the unmistakable symptoms of social decadence—disintegration of common bonds, sentiments, and spirit.

Evidence that the fatal germ of decay has already begun its work in the Euripidean age, is furnished by the literature of the day. Even in the tragedies of Euripides we discover that striving after effect and novelty, that desire to show the ingenuity of the author, and that extreme self-consciousness which are incontrovertible symptoms of decaying art. The chorus which was originally the medium for the expression of awe and reverence has become a mere instrument for the invention of melodies. These false principles dominate all literary effort. As the people care less and less for what is beyond and above themselves the poet disregards the canons of true art in order to please.

While the art of this period is great and can by no means be called decadent even in the epoch following, yet a change in the direction of its aim is to be noticed. Thought, actuated no more by the great social ideals of the Age of Pericles, expresses itself in art of a domestic character. Imitating the life around, art ceases to be public and religious. Religion is losing its hold upon the people. The Greek feels no more an instinctive faith in his gods. Unconsciously at least, his attitude toward the belief of his

fathers is influenced by his private judgment. Hence the expression of that faith in temples ceases to be the goal of art.

In the next epoch, or that of decadence proper, the ego is the all-absorbing thought ; faith of all kinds is gone—faith in one's self, faith in others, faith in the destiny of the nation. Hence the aim of conduct is how to get the most out of the short space of years allotted to the individual. His comfort is the first consideration. Teachers, influenced no more by social ideals, abandon public life and make private life the object of study and precept. The Greek's former high sense of honor and keen love of liberty are gone. Hence he pays to have his land defended. Mercenaries constitute the army. "How much better it is to be under a good master than to live in poverty and be free," exclaims Menander. And again, "He who fights and runs away, will live to fight another day." Politics were abandoned by the best classes. The talented retired to schools of philosophy. Discussions flourished as actions ceased. The Greek religion of this period has no real meaning. It is full of ceremonies and foreign gods. In literature the desire to startle which was detected in the preceding epoch is now carried so far that in the Cassandra of Lycophron of Alexandria there is a riddle in every line. Illustrations are given for their own sake, not for the purpose of making clear a point. Literature steps beyond its proper sphere and encroaches upon the domain of painting. With the exception of the poems of Theocritus who goes to the country for his themes (an innovation), and the epigrams, there is nothing original in the literature of the period.

The art of the period follows the bent it had already taken in the preceding age, becoming more and more domestic and less and less public and religious. Though no great monuments or temples are erected, house architecture continues to develop. The sphere of art is narrowed to suit the tastes of

the day. But still it is a great art. Who could impugn an art which produced a Venus de Medici, a Farnesian Bull or a Laocoön?

Now what conclusion can be drawn from this rapid survey of Grecian decadence? Was not ultra development of individualism responsible for that dwindling of social pride, that fading of a common faith and vanishing of ideals, that treatment of the present as the all-engrossing time, that adoption of personal comfort and luxury as the end of living, that substitution of theorists for men of action which led to the ultimate decline of the nation whose culture the world has never been able to surpass?

What now is the story of Rome? "The ancient Roman," says Mommsen, "felt the glory and might of the community as a personal possession to be transmitted to posterity by every individual." This collective sense of pride held the state together. When the Roman citizen lost it Rome became degenerate. In the time of Cato the Elder occur the first symptoms of decay in the peculiar institutions, traditions, and customs of the Romans. Foreign ideals are beginning to sway conduct and life, and Roman religious identity soon loses itself through the rapid assimilation of strange cults. Greek fancies and customs are eagerly adopted, among them drinking the health, or "playing the Greek" as it was called. Indeed, the Romans are soon playing the Greek in all concerns of life both domestic and public. The imitative capacity of the Roman soon leads to a cosmopolitanism which results ultimately in the loss of patriotism, the disappearance of national feeling and the growth of an extreme individualism, which here, as in the case of Greece, proves the nation's bane. At this time religion has already become ossified into theology. The native gods and observances have been supplanted or modified by foreign cults. The cultured cease to believe in the old gods and the government uses the national religion as a superstition for imposing upon the public

at large. Corruption enters politics and administration too, at this time. The following instance illustrates the degeneration into which the old customs had fallen : From early times it had been the custom to dismiss a political gathering if a thunderstorm arose. Now, a law was enacted by which a popular assembly was to be dismissed if it should occur to a high magistrate to merely look up at the sky for the approach of a storm. In this way it was possible to prevent the passage of any law, and the power of the officials thus became immeasurable.

This state of things continued to increase until the period marked by the striving for one-man power is reached—the time of Catiline, Pompey, Cicero and Cæsar. The old pride of the Roman in his state is now almost gone. Selfish aims dominate politics. The great men of the day are as individualistic as the Greeks ever were. Social ideals are supplanted by selfish ones; the bonds uniting the citizens of Rome as Romans are much weakened.

Then comes the story of the empire. Under the emperors the taste for luxury, fostered by Augustus, grows until it reaches its climax during the reign of Nero. As the Roman became more and more cosmopolitan, he became more and more lax. Pleasure grew to be the main business of life. The number of national games and festivals was greatly increased. Gladiatorial combats in which human blood was shed became the chief amusement. Trade with the East was increased for the sake of indulgence in personal luxury. The great revolution in manners and life produced an economic revolution. Residence in the city was now more desired. As the people flocked in from the country rents rose. In consequence of the overcrowding of the towns a large unemployed class arose. Therefore many took to plundering, cheating, usurious trading in money. Dice playing had to be checked by legislature. When we contemplate the extent to which vice and luxury were spread abroad, we are astonished that the empire endured as it

did, and most of all that it had vitality enough left to recover somewhat from the depths into which it was plunged by Nero.

But such was its vigor that a period of what Gibbon calls "general felicity" follows. During the eight reigns extending over one hundred and ten years, from Vespasian to Marcus Aurelius, prosperity did seem to smile once again on Rome. The people, profiting by the experience of the early empire abandoned luxurious living. Frugal manners and habits were approved at court. Vespasian once rebuked a candidate for office who entered his ante-chamber highly perfumed, saying: "I had rather you had smelt of garlic." Wealth was no longer the highest object of desire. Learning was encouraged. But in spite of these facts the period was, after all, but an effort at recuperation. No permanent good resulted from it. The Romans were too far along the road to ruin to be called back. For even in this period of temporary brightness the religion, literature, and art show unmistakable signs of decay. The fear of the barbarians and the horror of plagues and famine led the people to resort to ancient religious ceremonies. The renewed faith in dreams and astrology, partly due to the reaction against the skepticism of the first century, restored the oracle to his sometime post of honor. New shrines to the deities of earth, air and water were erected. Sacrificial worship was instituted for the gods supposed to have an influence over health. As a consequence of this renewal of old customs which the intellect of the race had outgrown, pretenders of all sorts arose. Thus religion was characterized by fanaticism on the one hand and by insincerity on the other.

In art the aim was not beauty but novel effects. All was sacrificed to this idea. Hence the erection of such buildings as the temple of Hadrian in Ajzicus, Bithynia is a sign of the times. This temple was of such gigantic proportions that Aristides in his dedicating speech says: "Your city is the only one which does not need lighthouses or high towers

to guide mariners to its harbor. The temple fills, as it were, the whole horizon and marks the situation of the city. Every block of marble is as a complete temple." The use of stucco work instead of stone for decoration, and brick and cheap materials in parts not intended to be seen, are other proofs of the insincerity of their art. The sculptor, too, strove to make an impression and stamped with self-consciousness all his work. Realism is attempted in portrait statues clothed as in real life. The sphere of one art encroaches upon that of another. This is seen in the bas-reliefs, which appropriate principles both of sculpture and painting.

In literature, from the time of Augustus to that of Marcus Aurelius, the individualistic tendency is noticed. As in the corresponding period in Grecian history, all canons of art are subordinated to the effort to please and astonish. Applause of his contemporaries was the author's goal. Hence the literature of the day is marked by lawlessness in the choice of subjects, violence of expression, mannerisms of all kinds. We do hear a protest against this sort of thing from Quintilian. He was, however, out of sympathy with his times and so his protest was in vain. "Almost all our speech is metaphor," he says. The antique, the remote, the unexpected was the fashion. Satire and epigram were the characteristic form of literary production. Seneca, Statius and Martial were all time-servers. Juvenal, however, paints the social vices of his age, and Lucian ridicules the superstition of the people.

After the death of Marcus Aurelius the decay of the Romans went steadily on without conscious effort at recoil until it culminated in the fall of Rome. Loss of national identity, resulting in intense individualism, is the feature of this last stage of Roman decadence. Indeed Rome became the rendezvous for adventurers from all over the world. It was dangerous to venture abroad in the streets even in the daytime, so full were they of desperate characters. Ammianus Marcellinus, speaking of the fourth

century, says: "But of the lower and most indigent class of the populace some spend the whole night in the wine shops. Some lie concealed in shady arcades of the theatres . . . or else they play at dice so eagerly as to quarrel over them; or (and this is a favorite pursuit of all others) from sunrise to evening they stay gaping through sunshine or rain, examining in the most careful manner the most sterling good or bad qualities of the charioteers and horses."<sup>1</sup> The rabble of the capital, accustomed to being fed by despotic rulers, cried "Give us bread for nothing and games forever." Even in the age of Trajan Juvenal made one of his characters say: "I cannot bear this Greek city. But the Greeks are not the worst feature, for the Syrian Orontes has long since emptied itself into the Tiber."

Among the signs of the times are the withdrawal of gold and silver from circulation, the unequal distribution of wealth, the rapid depopulation of the empire, the frequency of fires, famines, and epidemics, the degeneracy of the soldier class, the loss of respect for learning, and the substitution of frivolous amusements for the more dignified ones of early days. Says Ammianus Marcellinus: "Those few houses which were formerly celebrated for the serious cultivation of becoming studies are now filled with the ridiculous amusements of torpid indolence, re-echoing with the sound of vocal music and the tinkle of flutes and lyres. Lastly, instead of a philosopher we find a singer; instead of an orator some teacher of the ridiculous arts is summoned, and the libraries are closed forever like so many graves; organs to be played by water power are made, and lyres of so vast a size that they look like wagons; and flutes and ponderous machines suited for the exhibitions of actors."<sup>2</sup> The Roman had at this time utterly lost his personal pride in the glory of the community and his doom was sealed.

From the foregoing review of these two ancient civilizations it is evident that excessive individualism caused their

<sup>1</sup> Ammianus Marcellinus, p. 21.

<sup>2</sup> Ammianus Marcellinus, p. 19.

decay. In Greece the analytical turn of mind led to extreme individualism, while in Rome the Roman's imitativeness led to the loss of national character and the consequent growth of individualism. In both cases the rise of individualism, while beneficial at first, proved fatal because it was not controlled and moderated by the group. When individualism fosters the consciousness of one's self to the exclusion of group consciousness it becomes destructive, for in societies an exaggerated self-consciousness of the unit is destructive, group consciousness is preservative. The only individualism which can exist permanently in a progressive society is that which is controlled by group consciousness, that in which the individual personality is brought to completeness and freedom under control of group ideals. This is the lesson the ancients failed to master in their struggle for world power. Are we moderns any wiser? Dr. Lester F. Ward says: "As yet only the individual is rational. The way to counteract the evil effects of mind operating in the individual is to infuse a larger share of the same mind element into the controlling power of society. Such a powerful weapon as reason is unsafe in the hands of one individual when wielded against another. It is still more dangerous in the hands of corporations, which proverbially have no souls. It is most baneful of all in the hands of compound corporations, which seek to control the wealth of the world. It is only safe when employed by the social ego emanating from the collective brain of society and directed toward securing the common interests of the social organism."<sup>1</sup>

To sum up. A healthy social life, which consists in the maximum of individual freedom, enterprise and ambition, coupled with a hearty and generous cherishing of common or group interests and concerns, must be steered between Scylla and Charybdis. The one danger is *institutional decadence*, due to a dying out of energy, enterprise, and power of co-operation by reason of an overgrowth of traditions and

<sup>1</sup> The Psychic Factors of Civilization, p. 276.



institutions which fetter the individual without serving group interests. The other danger is *individualistic decadence*, due to the suffering of all common or group interests by reason of the dissolution of common faiths, ideals, and undertakings and the hypertrophy of private consciousness, private feelings, and private aims. Strange as it may seem, the final stage of each disease is the same. Toward the end of either type of decadence we have people who are egoistic without being strong in individual character, selfish without being ambitious, unscrupulous without being enterprising, depending on one another, yet without the capacity of co-operation, sociable yet powerless for effective association, too indifferent for great corporate achievements, yet too feeble for splendid individual achievements.

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